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THE LIBERAL CHRISTIAN.

PUBLISHED ONCE A FORTNIGHT.

PRICE ONE DOLLAR, IN ADVANCE.

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN."—LUKE II. 14.

VOL. I.]

BROOKLYN, (CONN.) DECEMBER 17, 1823.

[No. 20.]

DOCTRINES OF CALVINISM!!

"A LAYMAN of Brooklyn" offered to our readers, in the last number of this paper, some sensible observations upon the popular doctrine of Atonement. We have no doubt that a great many persons give their assent to this and the kindred doctrines of Calvinism, without really *knowing* what they profess to believe. In order that our readers may have a fair opportunity to judge for themselves what Calvinism is, we shall make a few quotations from the most highly esteemed orthodox "Confessions of faith," and from the writings of some of the most eminent defenders of this system.

1. To us, Calvinism seems to teach that *God made men sinners.*

Calvin himself says, "we are every one of us born infected with original sin, and from our mother's womb are under the curse of God, and a sentence of damnation—and this not on account of another's sin only, but on account of the wickedness, which is within us even when it does not shew itself." How came this to be our deplorable condition? The Westminster Assembly of Divines inform us that "The Fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery"—"Our first parents being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit." "They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature was conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation." "By this imputation of sin or corruption of our nature we are utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil and that continually." We next inquire how the fall, that event which has produced such disastrous consequences to the whole human race, came to pass? The same learned Assembly of Divines will inform us. "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." And this sin of our first parents, "God was pleased according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit,

having purposed to order it to his own glory." Calvin also says, "I acknowledge this to be my doctrine, that not merely by the permission of God, but by his secret counsel, Adam fell, and by his fall drew all his posterity into eternal ruin." Reader, what does the language we have quoted imply, if it does not imply that God, who is our creator, has made us sinners?

2. Calvinism, we think, teaches that men cannot do any thing to procure or prevent their salvation.

The Westminster Assembly's confession & our own Saybrook Platform teach that "by the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death." "These angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished." "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God (before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will) hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions or causes moving him thereunto, and all to the praise of his glorious grace." "Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, or effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified and saved, but the elect only." In Calvin's Institutes are the following passages. "All things being at God's disposal, and the decision of salvation or death belonging to him, he orders all things by his counsel and decree, in such a manner, that some men are born, devoted from the womb to certain death; that his name may be glorified in their destruction." And again; "I ask, how has it come to pass, that the fall of Adam has involved so many nations with their infant children in eternal death, and this without remedy; but because such was the will of God?"

Not only does this irreversible decree of God render it entirely useless for men to attempt to do any thing to procure their salvation, but according to Calvinism, the fall has put it out of their power to do any thing.—Read the following declaration of Calvin himself; “I detest those who ascribe to us any freedom of will, by which we may prepare ourselves to receive the grace of God; or by which we may ourselves co-operate with the Holy Spirit, that may be given us.” In the Westminster Assembly’s Confession and the Saybrook Platform we are told that, “Man by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself or to prepare himself thereunto.” A similar belief was professed by the Synod of Dort. “All men are conceived in sin and born children of wrath, without ability for any good tending to salvation, inclined to evil, dead in sins, and slaves of sin; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, have neither will nor power to return to God, to correct their depraved nature, or to dispose themselves to its correction.” And our own President Edwards in his treatise on original sin asserts that, “so long as men are in their natural state, they not only have no good thing but it is impossible that they should have or do any good thing.” They are however wholly unable to escape from this natural state, unless they are of the number of the elect! This is expressly declared by the Westminster and Saybrook Divines in the x Chap. of their Confessions! “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and *those only*, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call by his word and spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ renewing their wills and by his *Almighty power* determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.” These divines further declare that “this effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call.”—“Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the word, and may

have some common operations of the Spirit, yet not being effectually drawn by the Father, they neither do nor can come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved.

What language could have been used, that would more explicitly assert the utter inability of men to do any thing for their own salvation? If the above stated doctrines of Calvinism be true, it is useless for us to make an effort in the way of well doing; we may just as safely run riot in the way of our hearts and the sight of our eyes, fulfilling all the desires of the flesh, and following all the imaginations of the thoughts; for we must inevitably go to eternal perdition unless God of his own free will and pleasure has seen fit from before the foundation of the world, to elect and predestinate us to eternal life. It would still be advisable indeed, that we should do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly, because our happiness in this world will be greatly promoted by such a course of conduct; but as to the world beyond the grave, all that we may do or omit to do here will not (according to Calvinism) in the least degree affect our condition there. If we are among the small number of the “Elect,” we shall certainly be saved at any rate; and if we are not of that number we shall be damned at any rate.

It is our intention in future numbers of this paper, to state the other doctrines of Calvinism. In the mean time we wish our readers would take the trouble to peruse attentively the Westminster Assembly’s confession of Faith and Larger Catechism, or the Saybrook Platform. We also refer them to the Christian Disciple, vol. iv, p. 244, where they will find “Views of Calvinism” by Professor Norton of Cambridge. Under this head, the author has by numerous passages from eminent calvinistic writers delineated the odious features of that popular system of Theology.

Mr. Editor.—The following communication on the doctrine of Atonement was written by me previously to the one published in your last, but was by accident mislaid. Should you be of opinion that it will be of any service in elucidating the subject, and that the resemblance between it and the other is not so great as to destroy its interest, you are at liberty to publish it. I would however premise, that it has been far from my intention in both these communications, to intimate, that the respect which we pay to the memory of those earthly heroes mentioned in them, can be compared with that

holy love, veneration and gratitude due to Jesus Christ. He is a divine personage; the son of the Everliving God; and the salvation which he has effected is co-extensive with the earth, embraces the whole family of man, and endures through time and eternity!—They were men like ourselves, and the salvation which they wrought (if indeed it be proper to dignify it with that name) was wholly of a temporal nature, and extended, comparatively speaking, but to a very small number of individuals—I make these remarks, not because I think that either of these communications can with any fairness of construction, be made to speak a different language, but because I know there are those, who delight to misrepresent every thing advanced by Unitarians in favor of their religious opinions, and endeavor to make it appear that Unitarians have no regard for the Scriptures, and are, in fact, infidels in disguise.

A Layman of Brooklyn.

Epaminondas, Alfred and Washington have been frequently styled the Saviour, of their respective countries. By their patriotic toils and heroic exertions, it is said their respective countries were ransomed from slavery and restored to the enjoyment of the rights of man. And had our illustrious Washington been amongst the number of those of his brave countrymen who fell at the battle of Yorktown, at the close of the American Revolution, we should undoubtedly say, "he died for his country;" "his blood was shed for his country." Now expressions like these are perfectly proper; they deceive no one, because no one understands them in their literal sense.

Without pretending to say how the fact is, let us suppose that Jesus Christ was sent by God to point out to men the way of salvation, that in the prosecution of this his divine labor he endured willingly the most cruel persecution; that in order to enforce the doctrines and precepts which he taught, and to convince all mankind by the most irrefragable evidence that he was not an impostor, he yielded up himself to a most disgraceful and agonizing death. If this was the fact, could we not say with propriety, "Christ died for us"—"his blood was shed for sinners," and would not the inspired penmen who have written his biography and the holy prophets who foretold his appearance on earth, whose writings throughout abound with the boldest figures, be very apt in speaking of him to call him a sacrifice, and make use of precisely the

same language which we actually find in the Holy Scriptures applied to him? If so, then is it not probable that the theory respecting Christ which I have given above is the correct one? Is it not more rational to believe it than to believe that he was *literally* a sacrifice in the same sense that the slaughtered rams and goats amongst the Jews were sacrifices? When we meet with a passage of scripture which will bear two distinct significations, the one figurative and the other literal, the most advisable method to determine which of these significations was intended to be conveyed by the writer, is to ascertain by careful examination which best comports with the general tenor of scripture. Let us apply this rule to the subject under consideration. The general tenor of scripture certainly represents God as a Being deserving the highest exercise of our love and gratitude. The doctrine of atonement, as it is commonly believed by those who style themselves Orthodox, represents God as a Being angry with mankind, thirsting for blood, and refusing to be appeased until they or some one for them shall, by actual suffering, pay the debt to the very last farthing which their sins have imposed upon them. It represents his anger as burning with unabated violence, until looking down from above he sees an innocent being expiring upon the cross, and hears his dying agonies; he then becomes appeased, and offers to pardon those guilty wretches even whilst they are thus barbarously murdering the son of his Love! Is it possible to believe all this concerning God, and still believe that "God is love"? It is impossible. It does not therefore either comport with the general tenor of scripture nor with the common sense of mankind, and cannot be true.—But those passages of scripture, by which it is contended this doctrine is proved will bear the construction which is put upon them in the former part of this communication. Can we hesitate then for a moment which to believe? It will in my opinion be very easy to show that a belief in the orthodox doctrine of the atonement is inconsistent with love to God. We may perhaps love that being who suffered for us, but we cannot love him who exacted the suffering. We must view him with the same terror that the Hindoos do their god, Juggernaut, and not with the love and affection of a child towards a parent, as we are commanded to do. But love is the very foundation and essence of the Christian religion. Whatever doctrine therefore tends to diminish or destroy that love is not only odious & demoralizing, but is absolutely false.

DOCTRINES OF THE REFORMATION.

From the Springfield Recorder.

WE frequently hear the doctrines of Calvin called doctrines of the reformation: if this phrase means nothing more than that these doctrines were left untouched by the reformers, it may perhaps be true; but, if it is intended to declare that they were at that time first received and made part of the religious light which that event threw in upon the world, many of your readers would be at a loss to know wherein the reformation consisted.—The truth is, they are of Roman Catholic growth; they were known and believed in the Roman Church for ages before Luther existed, and I think it is not difficult to give the reason why in the work of reforming abuses, he suffered these doctrines to remain.

But I confess it is difficult to imagine why they were first invented, and how they should have found favor when they were first proposed; for they are not laid down in the scriptures, and they have no loveliness of their own to recommend them. It might have seemed like humility to attribute, as they do, all agency to God; and it might be very well to humble ourselves thus, if we could do it without at the same time throwing off our responsibility. If all our actions as these doctrines presuppose, are produced by the direct agency of God, they are not ours, and if they are wrong we are not guilty: the proper reverence is to ascribe to him those powers which he has given, and left us at liberty to use them well or ill. But these doctrines did not originate in this overstrained humility—they were first suggested in the bitterness of dispute; the maxims were introduced and maintained one after another, till they were framed into a system, which was not very consistent, but what was of more importance to the framers, would admit of being defended. Augustin, in the sixth century, was the first to propose this system. It seems that Pelagius, a British monk, had declared that good works only are valuable in the sight of God, and Augustin took up the controversy against him: this he maintained with great severity, advancing one proposition and article after another, till probably much to his own astonishment he found himself the author of a faith entirely new. In opposition to the principle of merit, he declared that divine grace is necessary to bend the will, and where this grace is not afforded, we have only power to do evil, but none to do good; that ac-

tions which seem to be religious, if performed without divine grace, are nothing more than splendid sins. He also maintained that all men sinned in Adam and should bear the everlasting punishment of his crime. But the thought of infants seemed to stagger his faith till he ingeniously discovered that though they were in hell, their punishment would not be very severe, and they would choose it in preference to annihilation. He then laid down as a consequence of his doctrine, of our want of freedom, that God had predestinated some to eternal life, and others to destruction. Such were his opinions, which one would suppose could not prevail by their own reasonableness and truth; but St. Augustin knew human nature too well to place much dependence on those recommendations. He had great influence in the Church, and Pelagius had none; he procured a sentence of council condemning the faith of his adversary, who was banished and died in obscurity; and then the opinions of Augustin prevailed almost without contradiction; for there was reward in keeping them, and there were not many so weakly honest nor so imprudently fond of truth, as to embrace the faith of a powerless, neglected and banished man.

Now it must be remembered, that Luther was a monk of the order of St. Augustin, and professed his doctrines in their full extent. It was not to be expected that in a time of dissension, he should abandon the opinions he had professed before, and accordingly we find that after the reformation, he held them more firmly than ever. He labored to reform abuses in practice rather than in faith, and with all his zeal, his feeling was not enlightened. It seems essential to a thorough polemic to believe himself right, and others entirely wrong; to be able to discern no trace of excellence in his adversaries, but on the contrary to hate them with a religious hatred. These qualifications Luther possessed in an eminent degree, but at the same time he had fortitude and resolution that probably would not have been found in a milder and more benevolent heart. Beside the circumstance that Luther had been educated in the opinions of St. Augustin, we must remember that among other Catholic abuses, he was opposing the doctrine of merit. The Catholics had a strange persuasion that the saints and martyrs had much more merit than they had any use for, and all the excellence over and above what was necessary for their own justification, was claimed as the proper-

ty of the Church; when any Catholic had committed a sin, a sufficient quantity of this merit to cover it was transferred to his account. Upon this accumulated stock of merit, they sold indulgences to commit sin.—Hence in opposing the doctrine, of merit, Luther thought it necessary to preach against good works in every possible form; he would not allow them to be either the means or condition of salvation, nor even a preparation for receiving it, and one of his immediate followers went so far as to say they were an impediment to salvation. The reason that the doctrines of grace are called Calvinistic, is that they were abandoned by the Lutherans soon after Luther's death, and were taken up by Calvin, who enjoys the reputation (such as it is) of being their author.

That these are doctrines of the reformation, then means nothing more than that they were not then reformed, and sufficient reasons for not rejecting them, are found in the education, views, and character of the great reformer. The reformation was not then complete: for we hold that liberality of feeling keeps pace with real reform in religion, and the purer one's faith is, the kinder he is to those who differ from him; when the faith is wrong, the heart is often right, but it is an abuse of language to call that a reformation, where the religious belief only is altered, and the heart is left as bitter and uncharitable as ever. In what manner the doctrines of grace operated upon the feeling of those who invented & those who maintained them, they have themselves borne abundant witness. St. Augustin, to whom we are indebted for the system, in his epistle to Vincentius, argues strongly in favor of severe persecution of heretics; he gives us to understand, that he had formerly considered mild persuasion as most effectual to reclaim them, but they only abused his good nature, and he had in consequence altered his opinion; for he had known capital punishment tried with the happiest effect, and though the conversion produced in the mind of a heretic by fear of burning, could not be very sincere, it was considerably better than none. Luther retained too much of the spirit, and being utterly unable to discover in what way burning could operate to the conversion of an infidel, proposed for his part to confine them as madmen. In the thirty years' war which followed the reformation, both protestants and catholics united in the opinion that heresy should be exterminated by fire and sword, and there

is something marvellous in the solemn assurance with which each party declared to the other, that it was done with a single eye to their spiritual good. Calvin declares, what he was never slow in declaring, his sentiments on this point, and justifies the burning Servetus alive by the following argument, before that time I believe unheard of in the court of conscience or morality. He says in one of his letters "Since the Papists, in order to vindicate their superstition, cruelly shed innocent blood, it is a shame that a christian ruler should have no courage in the defence of certain truth." I am far from mentioning these things to throw reproach on Calvinism. I think that they should be attributed to the spirit of the age. I do it in order to show that the light which dawned upon the world in the reformation was not complete—that much was absolutely wrong in the practice of the reformers, and when their ideas of Christian charity were no purer, there is reason to believe that their faith was not perfect.

If we still call these the doctrines of the reformation, we should remember that they remain to be reformed; not by the persecuting spirit of the first reformers—not by severe denunciations nor ungenerous treatment of those who believe them. These are always the supports of a cause that is not worth defending, and such arguments are never employed except for want of better. This reformation is begun and is rapidly advancing. There is not so much said of original sin as formerly, and the liability of infants to suffer for sinfulness not their own. We hear less of total depravity, and Unitarians would not deny an explanation somewhat similar to Dr. Chalmers, 'that men are born ungodly,' as they are born without any sentiments & have them to acquire. The doctrine of election, as stated by Dr. Woods, 'God eternally purposed to save a great number of our race, and purposed to save them precisely in the manner in which he does save them' we are quite willing to assent to.—If Mr. Stuart actually intends to assert that 'in his union with Jesus of Nazareth, the divine Logos could not of course be necessitated at once to put forth all his energy, to exhibit all his knowledge and wisdom: just so much of it and no more was manifested as was requisite to constitute the character of an all sufficient incarnate Mediator and Redeemer;' to this we will heartily agree; and if these gentlemen would not consent to the Unitarian sentiments which these words seem

to us to imply, the very necessity of using them—of softening down the language which has not hitherto been contradicted, is itself an evidence of considerable reformation and a promise of more improvement in this portion of the world.

IGNORANCE AND FANATICISM.

(From Bishop Brownell's Charge, 1821.)

Having made some judicious remarks upon *knowledge* as being next to *piety*, the most essential qualification to the Christian Minister, the author proceeds ;

If it were necessary to urge any thing further on this topic, I would refer you to the effects of ignorance as they are displayed in the presumption, the errors, and extravagancies of those untaught and self-constituted teachers who assume to be above the aids of human learning, and cherish the fond conceit that they are acting under the immediate and perceptible influence of the Holy Ghost.—You will see such men discuss the most difficult points of theology with the utmost boldness ; and decide at once, and with the most perfect confidence, questions which require the deepest research. The popish tenet of infallibility has been supposed to lie at the bottom of much of the bigotry which prevails in that Church. But of all bigots, no one is so confident and intolerant as he who imagines himself the subject of special, supernatural illumination. Such men boldly denounce all who dissent from their particular views as mistaken formalists, and suppose themselves capable of imparting new light and knowledge to every misguided flock which may forsake its proper Pastor in quest of novelty. Imagining themselves to have been the subjects of some special miracle, they become inflated with spiritual pride and self-righteousness. They fancy themselves the peculiar favorites of heaven, and say to those who can make no such pretensions, "stand by thyself ; I am holier than thou :"—believing the operations of the Holy Spirit to be direct, perceptible and instantaneous, and irresistible, they undervalue and despise the *ordinary means of grace*. They teach their ignorant followers to look for some special and supernatural out pouring of the Spirit, and to expect some special miracle to be wrought for their salvation :—and mistaking the suggestions of their own imaginations, for supernatural impulses and impressions, they run into every species of extravagance, super-

stition, and fanaticism. It is easy to perceive—and you have often had occasion to observe—the confusion and mischief which such men create in a religious community. These results are the natural consequences of ignorance, when heated with enthusiasm. Sound learning is one of the best preservatives against them, and a pious and well informed Clergy can afford the only antidote to the evils they produce.

THE DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS WHICH ATTEND THE INVESTIGATION OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

ONE cannot but feel anxious to know, which, among the various systems of Theology is true. This anxiety is increased by considering the difficulties and dangers, that attend the investigation of the subject. We will mention a few of these.

1. The language of Scripture is often ambiguous and figurative. Its style is tinged with the idioms, customs and character of distant and ancient nations. The words of Scripture do not always convey to us of the present day, one certain, unquestionable sense ;— and it hence comes to pass, that learned and pious commentators differ in their opinions about them.

2. To the study of subjects difficult in themselves and conveyed to us by the defective instrumentality of language, we bring minds imperfect in their capacities, darkened by sin, perverted by prejudice and swayed by feeling. We have reason to suspect ourselves on all these points and to tremble. It is a fact, beyond all doubt, that every man adopts a system before he examines it. He adopts it in youth, when he is not competent to examine ; he receives it from his teachers before he dare examine. And what is the consequence ? He goes to the Bible, to see if it will support his system. He wishes that it might. He is unwilling to differ from his parents, his friends and the community around him. And more than this, he has been led to think perhaps, that the system he holds is essential to salvation. Although therefore he resorts to the Bible as an infallible standard, yet he is to consider that his early notions may have clothed the language of Scripture in a meaning of their own ; so that his infallible standard in a measure fails him. And when he reflects that minds as lofty as those of Paschal and Fenelon, were involved in the superstitions of Popery, and saw nothing in the Bible to oppose them, he

will see additional reason to fear for himself.

3. Or to disclose another avenue to error, a man may have thrown off the shackles of his early education, and may boast of it.—He may be rejoicing in his escape from the thralldom of prejudice; and the pride of new opinions will tend to strengthen them, not because they are more rational or more scriptural than those he formerly held, but because they are more novel.

4. Add to all these perverting influences, the exasperation of dispute, and the clouds thicken into gloom over the way that leads to the temple of truth. A bitter, a sarcastic or contemptuous sentence or epithet, will often do the mind an injury, which volumes of argument cannot retrieve. And it happens from this as well as from other causes, that disputants are often driven to the extremes of opinion. This is unquestionably the tendency of all ordinary controversies, and why not of those which are upon religion? Are these last generally conducted with less heat and exasperation than others?

In the midst of these difficulties—difficulties which are incident to the various states of opinion—difficulties natural and artificial, from within and from without, we have cause to ponder, with anxious and awful interest, the inquiry "what is truth." And amidst all these difficulties, it may be suspected that nothing is more rare than to find a man of true religious candor and fairness—of genuine liberality—of a severely rational, cool and unbiassed mind—one who has arisen above this low atmosphere, where the very air seems to be tainted with the breathings of controversy and recrimination, up to the pure region of truth, where neither prejudice nor authority, nor passion, nor injury, nor strife can send up one influence to disturb and pervert his mind.

SECTARISM.

THERE is another picture which I would fain present to you—the picture of sectarian zeal, struggling for pre-eminence, mortified with failure and neglect or triumphing in success—boasting of its patrons and advocates and books, and telling up its numbers and its resources.

It is amazing to observe the influence of human authority in the high concerns of religion. It were to be wished (I must risk the unpopularity of the remark) it were to be wished that the names of Calvin and Arminius and Arius and Socinus had never been heard in the world. If they were good men,

they would shudder at the use which has been made of their authority. And what matter is it to you or me that Calvin or Socinus believed one thing or another. The great question with us is 'what did Christ teach?' and this inquiry is great and momentous enough, to make us forget that there has ever been a dispute or a controversy.

RELIGION.

Oh! wide they wander from the path of truth,

Who paint Religion with a brow of gloom;
Her step is buoyant, with unfading youth,
Her features radiant with immortal bloom.
In life's gay morning, when the crimson tide
Of pleasure, dances through each burning vein,

She leads with guardian care, her charge aside

From the broad passage to undying pain.

And when the fleeting joys of time are past,
And dark despondence on the spirit preys,

She bids with holy hope, the sufferer cast

To brighter regions his confiding gaze,

From vulgar joys, from low debasing cares,

'Tis hers alone the sinking soul to save.

For her its sweetest smile creation wears,

For her no horrors has the yawning grave,

Yea should this scene in headlong ruin close,

Each shattered planet from its orbit move.

She would not tremble, for full well she knows,

The arm is near her of UNBOUNDED LOVE.

The bounties of Providence acknowledged.

Father of light! we sing thy name,

Who kindest up the lamp of day;

Wide as he spreads his golden flame,

His beams thy power and love display.

Fountain of good! from thee proceeds,

In copious drops, the genial rain,

Which o'er the hills, and through the meads,

Revives the grass, and swells the grain.

Through the wide world thy bounties spread,

Yet thousands of our guilty race,

Though by thy daily bounty fed,

Despise thy law, reject thy grace.

Not so may our forgetful hearts

O'erlook the tokens of thy care;

But what thy liberal hand imparts,

Still own in praise, still ask in prayer.

Doddridge.

EXAMINE YOURSELVES.

LITTLE good can be done to men by public admonition till they can be persuaded to examine themselves, and to apply what they hear to their own cases. General exhortations to repentance and virtue must be useless, as far as those to whom they are directed think (for want of due examination) that they are already safe and virtuous and therefore have no need of them. Let us therefore, now for a few minutes employ our thoughts in the work of self examination; and in order to find out the true state of our characters, let us consider what answer we can give to such inquiries as the following; 1st. We should ask ourselves, whether we have ever had any serious thoughts about our own condition? I am afraid, that by putting this single question to themselves, many persons may immediately determine that they have no great reason to be pleased with themselves. Multitudes seem to indulge an indifference with respect to every thing religious; they go on from week to week, in carelessness and levity, without feeling any solicitude about their present characters and future hopes. Let us then ask ourselves, have we ever thought in earnest about being truly virtuous? have we ever felt ourselves alarmed, and taken up seriously the inquiry, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Is it possible that those can have repented of sin, who have never been under any conviction of it?—that those can inherit eternal life who do not make it an object of their attention; or that, contrary to what takes place in this world, the enjoyments and honors of another world are to be secured without preparing ourselves for them? In short, have we ever employed ourselves in the duty of self examination? If not, let us consider whether it is possible that we should have acquired true goodness. In order to this, it is necessary that we should have amended our faults, and in order to the amendment of our faults, it is necessary there should be a discovery of them, and there can be no discovery of them without examination. The like is to be said of any virtues we may have wanted—of any good we may have left undone, or of any duty we may have improperly neglected. We have all of us many deficiencies, and it is examination alone can inform us what they are, and how far they are, or are not inexcusable and dangerous. But further let us ask our-

selves, whether in the common course of our conduct we intend virtue as our end? Certain it is, that no one can be virtuous without designing it. But some there are who do not seem to go so far in virtue as even this. They are led almost entirely by views of interest, by the humor of the moment, or by natural temper, without ever settling before themselves, the whole of good, the obligations of morality, the good of mankind, and the acquisition of future bliss, as the guides and ends of their conduct. But let us reckon the contrary to be true. Let us suppose that the practice of religious virtue is really meant. It is obvious that this is only the first necessary step to saving goodness. We must not only mean, but execute. We must not only intend and resolve, but persevere and overcome, and make religious virtue the principal concern and business of our lives. Let us then ask ourselves, whether we do this? whether we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? whether we take more pains to be honest than to be rich, and prefer a consciousness of integrity to any temporal advantages? These are the leading points in our characters, and they ought to be the principal objects of self examination. Do we give diligence to secure God's acceptance? Do we shake off sloth, and press forward with ardor towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Or though we mean virtue, and look forwards to eternity, do we sleep and loiter, and content ourselves with languid wishes low attainments, and feeble efforts that are never effectual? Do we think ourselves good because we have some good in us, and possess perhaps even some good qualities? So far we are to be honored; but it ought not to satisfy us. The most vicious men have some good in them. Libertines and profligates have often amiable qualities. It is necessary that we should have prevailing goodness. The virtuous principle must be the reigning principle in our hearts. It is not enough that we love truth and right; but we must love them more than any thing that can come into competition with them. It is not enough that our attendance on the duties of piety is constant, our faith sincere, and our religious profession strict; but our profession, our faith and religious services must give efficacy to our good resolutions, deliver us from evil habits, and produce those fruits of righteousness which are necessary to adorn a religious character.

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